Jonathan Bayless

WWW Sites of Interest to Cultural Resources Personnel

It is now perhaps a cliché to start an article about the World Wide Web (WWW) with exclamations about the hundreds and thousands of new sites being created every day. The publicity generated about the Web has surely reached every professional involved in cultural resource preservation. However, for the majority of cultural resource professionals in the National Park Service, the Internet and all its allure remains a distant subject with no obvious relevance to the daily tasks of managing cultural resources. And perhaps for some offices, there could be compelling arguments that such access would not improve the quality of their accomplishments. At least in the short term. But such arguments will not remain true for very much longer.

Just as we have seen electronic mail revolutionize the speed and interconnection of information and individuals within an agency or office, the World Wide Web holds even greater potential to provide connections between interested public and professionals everywhere. It is hard to think back only a few short years ago, before email, to when paper-based transmission of all documents was the norm. In the near future,

when journals, magazines, and perhaps even our own daily administrative business is accessible over the Net, we will find the Internet just as indispensable.

So what does the World Wide Web have to offer? Other articles in this series have addressed this question at length. The strongest reason, in my opinion, for gaining access to the WWW is to gain the knowledge and experience necessary to create our own sites. But in order to eventually place our own resources on the Internet, we must first take advantage of the opportunities to learn and explore what others have done. Because only those with a working knowledge will be able to develop their own well-designed WWW sites and provide open access to the cultural resources and research records that we manage as a public trust.

For a look at a virtual museum exhibit, I like the Smithsonian Institution at http://www.si.edu. For an excellent example of a museum exhibit on the web containing imagery, video, and sound, check out the White House craft show at http://www.nmaa.si.edu. Perhaps the video clip of Hillary Clinton's introduction still suffers from the limitations of current technology. But the choice of looking at the collections either from a material type (ceramics, metals, etc.) and artist categories, or a room-by-room tour of the White House, shows the potential for customized user approaches, and the images of the collections are simply beautiful.
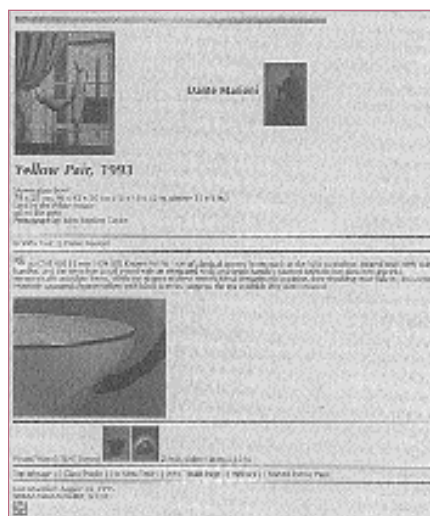
For a look at a growing network of historians, archivists, museum curators, preservation groups, and historical societies, the History Computerization Project at http://www.history.la.ca.us/history gives hundreds
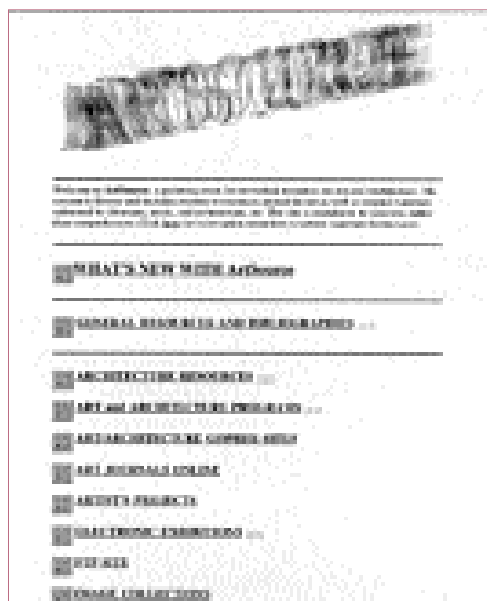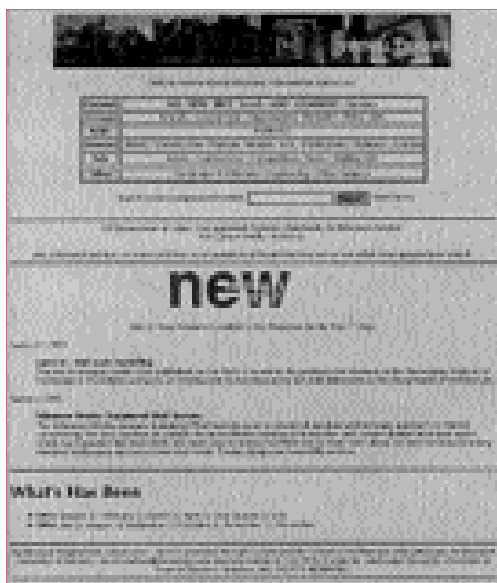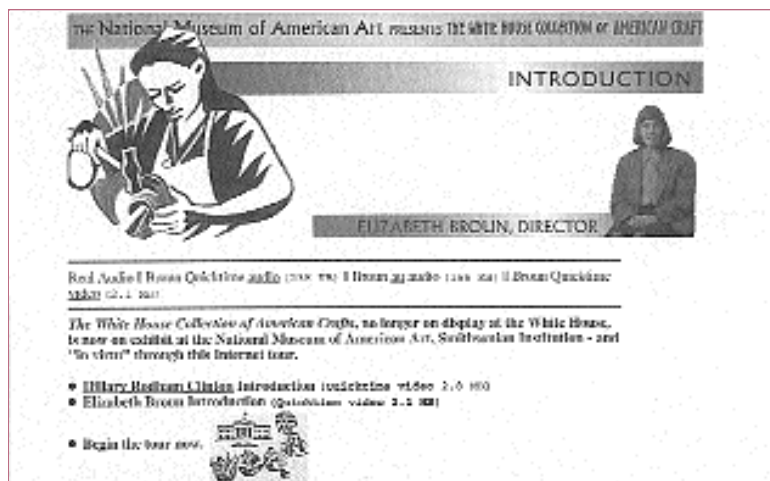
The home page of the White House Craft Show which may be found at http://www.nmaa.si.edu

More from the White House Craft Show.

of annotated directories and the chance to order a free copy of the History Database tutorial on computer database management. An entire series of virtual libraries are up and running. Try architecture and landscapes at http://www.clr.toronto.edu:1080/VIRTUALLIB/arch.html, or museums at http://www.comlab.ox.ac.uk/archive/other/ museums.html.

A number of sites contain regular updated listings of cultural resource related sites, and so make "surfing" much easier. These include the UNESCO World Heritage Center's "Internet Resources for Heritage Conservation, Historic Preservation, and Archeology" site at http://hpb.hwc.ca:7002/ICOMOS_Main_Page.html, and Artsource, called a "Point of networked resources on Art and Architecture" at http://www.uky.edu/artsource/artsourcehome.html. A good starting place is the subject-oriented Internet resource guides at http://www.lib.umich.edu/chhome.html.

Many have seen the National Park Service's own Website at http://www.nps.gov, which includes information on a variety of parks, along with a large body of cultural resource information. But many have not seen the Department of the Interior's home page at http://www.info.er.usgs.gov/doi/doi.html. It provides hypertext access to all the bureaus within the department.

Being professionally interested in biological museum collections, I found it very productive to access a listing entitled "Internet Resources for the Biologist" that contains addresses for almost 80 sites at http://nfrcg.gov/home-page/ htmls.html.

And an important look at our new Interior agency, the National Biological Service, can be gained at http://www.nbs.gov. Be sure to look at their interactive map available from their home page, that points you to the appropriate regional office and gives addresses and contacts.

The NPS has just put together a "NPS World Wide Web (Internet) Primer" to help parks "capitalize on opportunities presented by the Internet." It's available to NPS staff on cc:mail by requesting it from the address "NPS Webmaster." And yes, it seems that in the virtual reality of the World Wide Web, you can call yourself whatever your mind's eye envisions itself to be. Myself, I've been considering the nickname of a 13th-century Chinese poet, who called himself the "travelling abode of
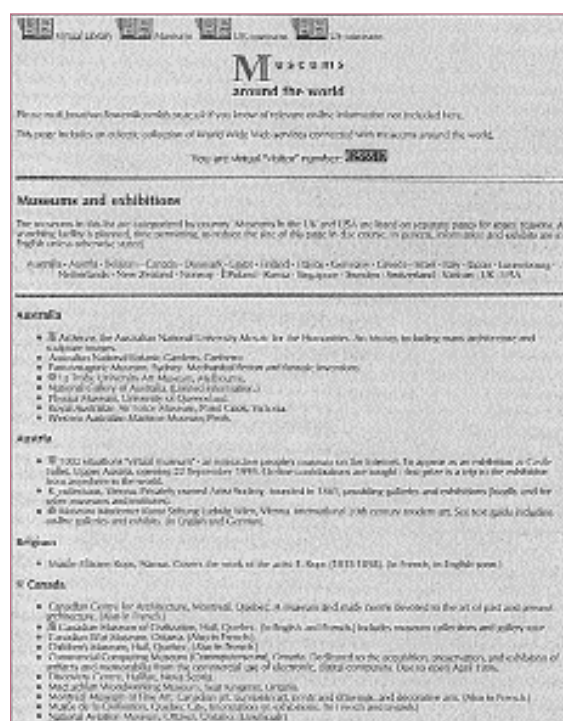
the vagrant weed." While we system curators do travel quite a bit, I'm still not sure such a title would convey the intended meaning, even in the virtual reality that grows more significant and real with each passing day.

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